ROSE™
MEREDITH FINCH • IG GUARA
THE FUTURE OF COMICS
25
image
EST. 1992
#1

Dear Reader,

As you join me in embarking on this journey with ROSE and THORNE, I would like to take a minute to thank the many people who have made this project possible.

First and foremost, I want to thank my incredible husband David. Without his support and encouragement, I would never have been brave enough to put my writing out into the world. His unfailing belief in me made the book you are about to read possible. He is my soul mate and my best friend, and I would be lost without him.

To my beautiful boys, Hayden, Everett and Isaac; thank you for being my biggest cheerleaders. Being your mother will always be my greatest accomplishment, and I can only hope that I am able to communicate through Rose a small part of the depth of my love and devotion to you.

To my teammates, Ig Guara and Triona Farrell. The beauty of what the two of you have created takes my breath away, and the emotional arc that takes place on each and every page is a masterpiece of storytelling. This is what comics were meant to be.

Any writing needs good editing, and I have been incredibly blessed to have the expertise and talents of Andy Schmidt from Comics Experience on this project. Andy has an uncanny ability to cut to the heart of what is missing and push me beyond my comfort zone in the process of ensuring I am writing the best possible story.

To my friend Erica Schultz: I can not tell you how much your support, encouragement and incredible patience has meant to me. God bless DC and their writers class for bringing you into my life.

To my local comic book shop, Rogues Gallery, and its owner, Shawn Cousineau: thank you for your support and your willingness to give me an open and honest response to my first draft of ROSE. You helped shape the story that unfolds on these pages.

Thank you to Eric Stephenson, and all of the staff at IMAGE COMICS, for believing in ROSE, and for the incredible amount of support you have thrown behind me. This experience has far exceeded anything I could have hoped for.

Finally, I want to thank you, the reader, for joining me on this journey with ROSE and THORNE. It is my hope that you will find something in this book that will speak to your heart as we each strive toward discovering our own personal truth.

God Bless You,

Meredith Finch

"LET ME TELL YOU A STORY, GRIER, ABOUT WHEN I WAS A GIRL. WHEN OUR LAND WAS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE AND THE KHATZ ROAMED FREELY.
"MAGICAL CREATURES, THE KHATZ WERE LINKED TO A GUARDIAN WHO EXEMPLIFIED VIRTUE.
"TEMPERANCE.
"JUSTICE.
"COURAGE.
"TOGETHER THEY HARNESSED THEIR GREAT POWER TO BRING PEACE AND BALANCE TO OUR WORLD.
"BUT THEN, THE KHATZ BEGAN TO DISAPPEAR AND THE MAGICS THAT HAD PROTECTED US ALL THOSE YEARS BEGAN TO FAIL.

"A GREAT EVIL ROSE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR WEAKNESS.

"OUR KING AND WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIS FORCES FOUGHT VALIANTLY...

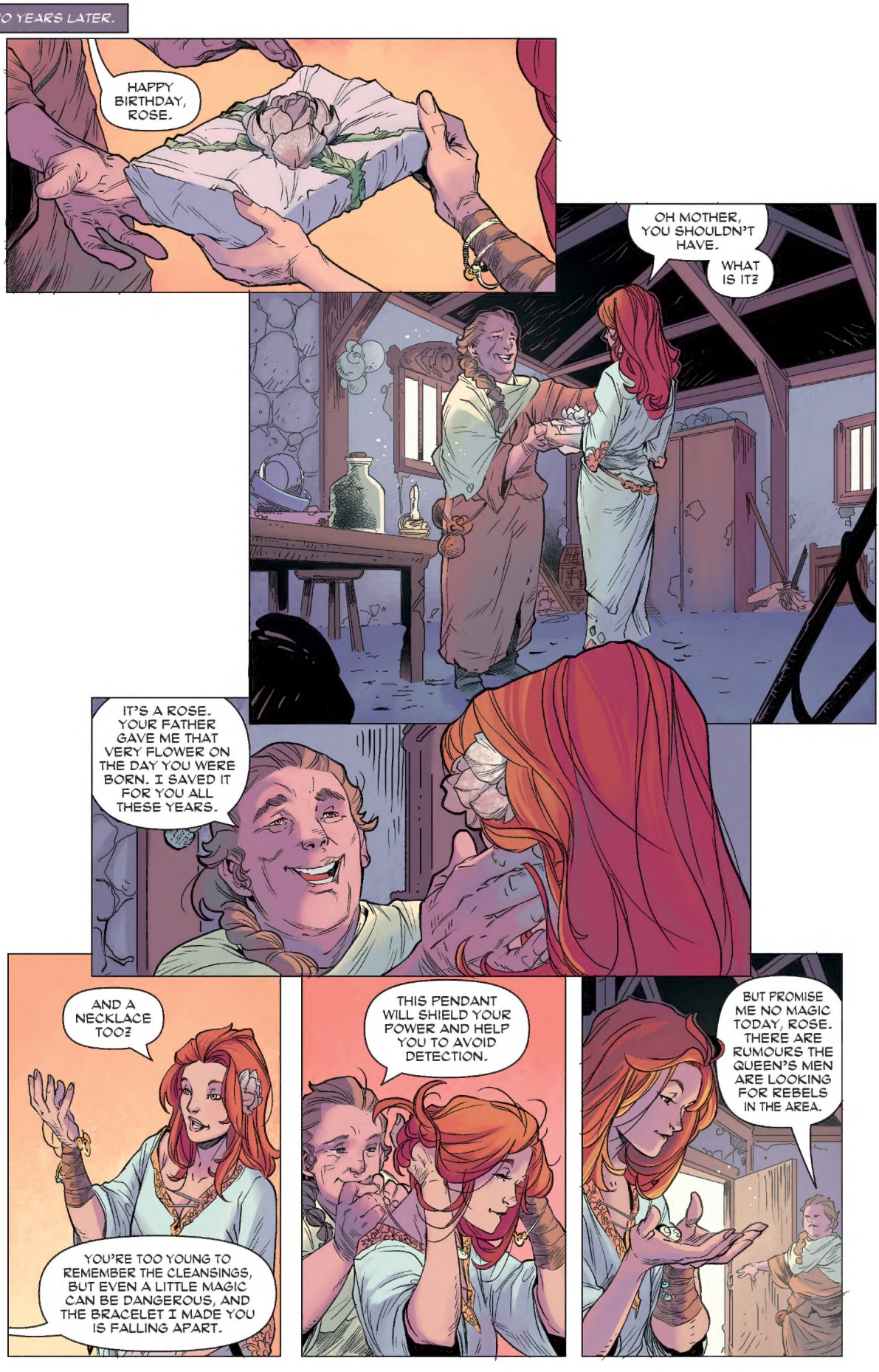
"BUT WITHOUT THE POWER OF THE GUARDIANS, IN THE END, DARKNESS PREVAILED.

"IN TIME, ALL KNOWLEDGE OF THE KHATZ WAS LOST AND ANY MAN, WOMAN OR CHILD WHO SHOWED SIGNS OF BEING A GUARDIAN WAS HUNTED AND DESTROYED."

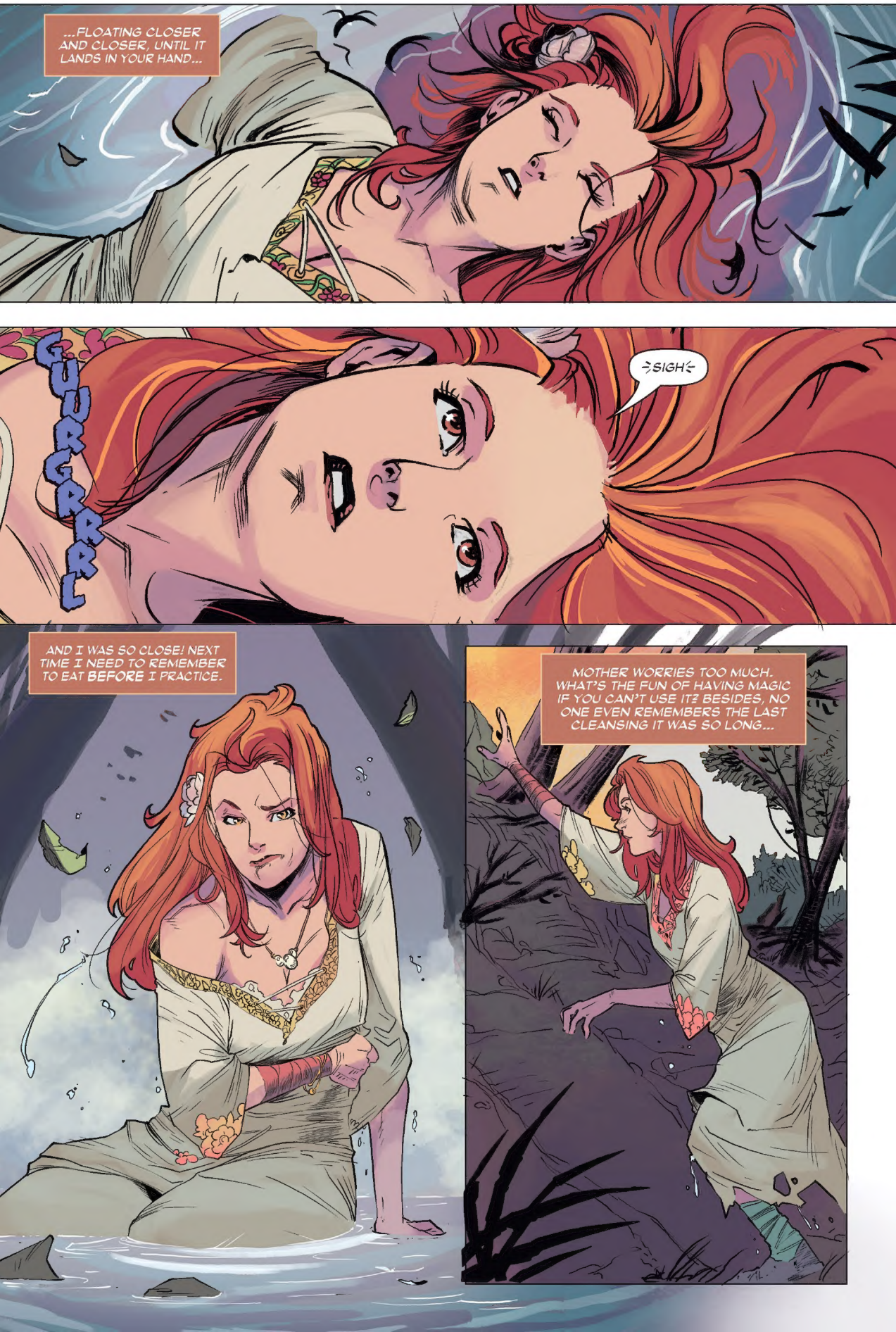
HUSH NOW, GRIER. YOUR POWER IS MANIFESTING AND WE'VE GOT TO HIDE IT.

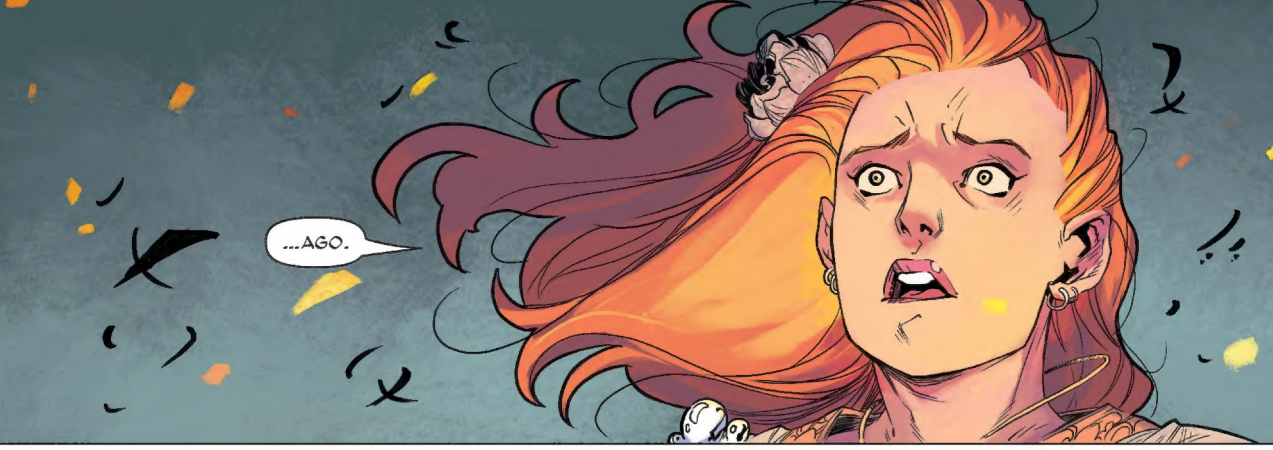
I JUST HOPE WE'RE NOT TOO LATE...

"OUR LAND AND ITS PEOPLE ARE DYING.
"THERE IS NO ONE LEFT TO SAVE US...
"THERE IS NO ONE LEFT TO CARE."
PLEASE MI'LORD. IF YOU BURN THE VILLAGE, HOW WILL WE SURVIVE THE WINTER?
FOOL.
WHUD
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SURVIVE THE DAY.


10 YEARS LATER.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ROSE.
OH MOTHER, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE.
WHAT IS IT?
IT'S A ROSE. YOUR FATHER GAVE ME THAT VERY FLOWER ON THE DAY YOU WERE BORN. I SAVED IT FOR YOU ALL THESE YEARS.
AND A NECKLACE TOO?
YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO REMEMBER THE CLEANSINGS, BUT EVEN A LITTLE MAGIC CAN BE DANGEROUS, AND THE BRACELET I MADE YOU IS FALLING APART.
THIS PENDANT WILL SHIELD YOUR POWER AND HELP YOU TO AVOID DETECTION.
BUT PROMISE ME NO MAGIC TODAY, ROSE. THERE ARE RUMOURS THE QUEEN'S MEN ARE LOOKING FOR REBELS IN THE AREA.

FOCUS...
ALMOST GOT IT...
DARN IT!
COME ON, ROSE, YOU CAN DO THIS. BE ONE WITH THE LEAF...
...DON'T FIGHT THE WIND, LET IT CARRY YOU...CLOSER...


...FLOATING CLOSER AND CLOSER, UNTIL IT LANDS IN YOUR HAND...
GUURGRRRL
SIGH
AND I WAS SO CLOSE! NEXT TIME I NEED TO REMEMBER TO EAT BEFORE I PRACTICE.
MOTHER WORRIES TOO MUCH. WHAT'S THE FUN OF HAVING MAGIC IF YOU CAN'T USE IT? BESIDES, NO ONE EVEN REMEMBERS THE LAST CLEANSING IT WAS SO LONG...

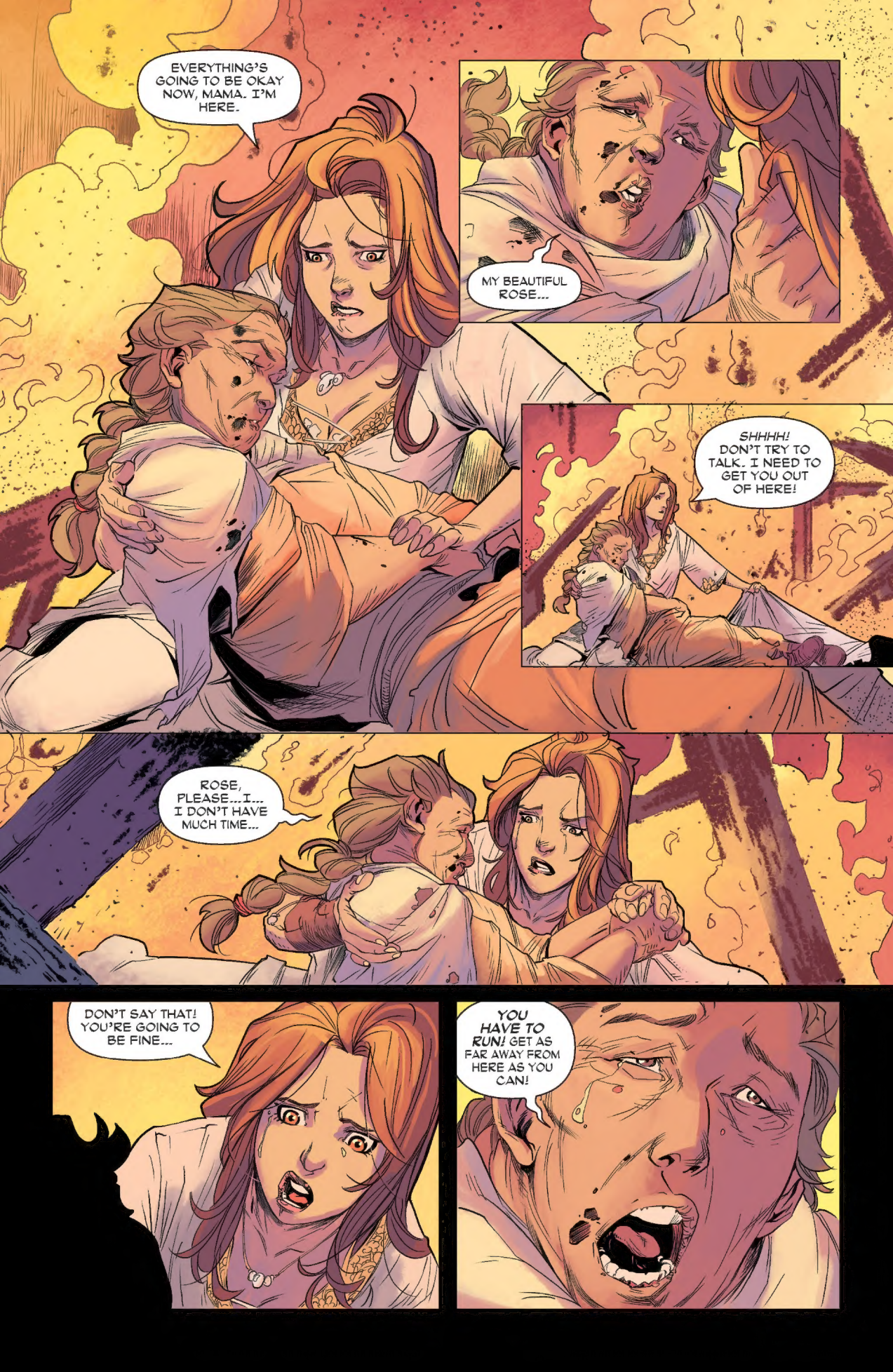

...AGO.

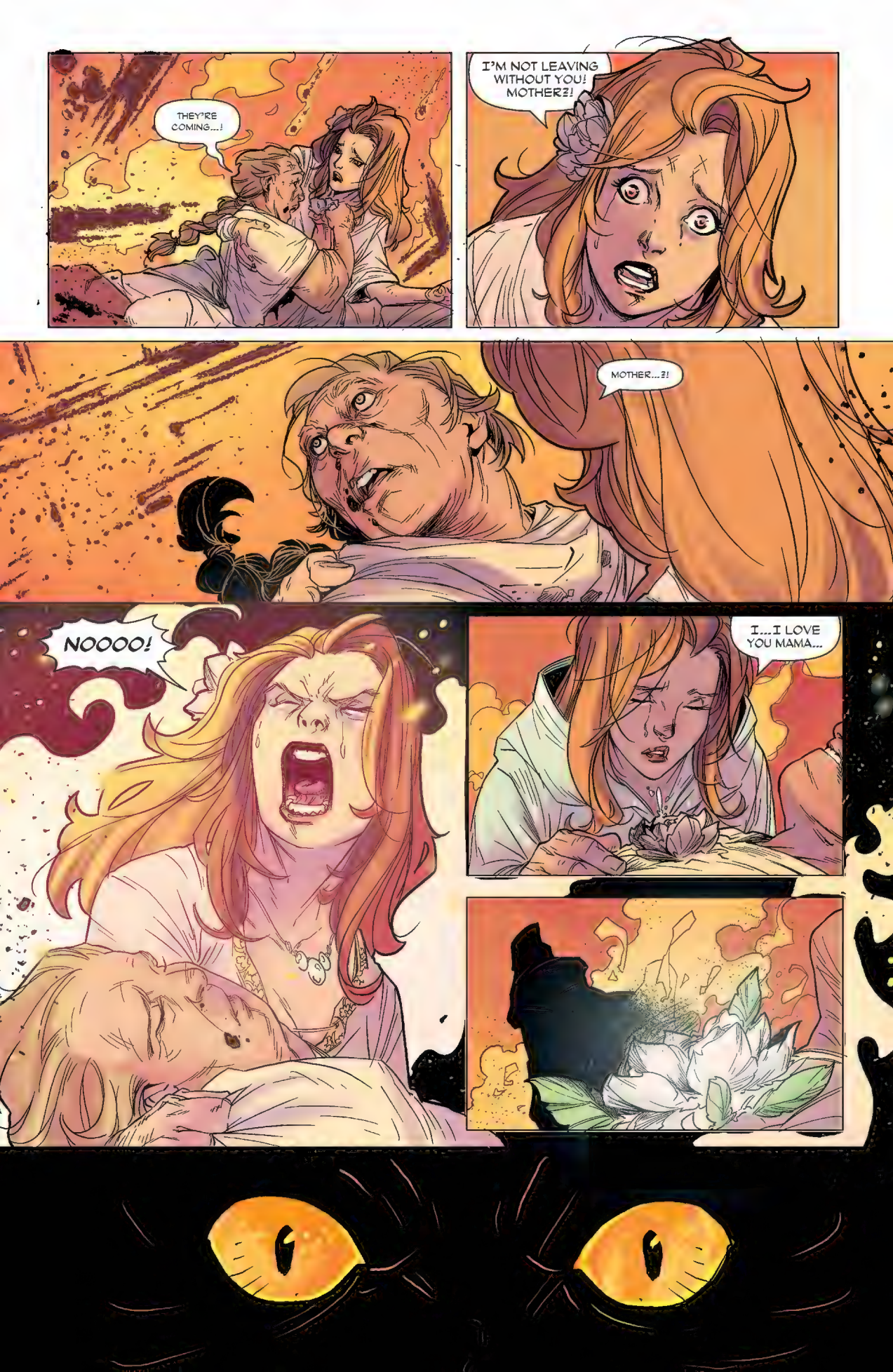
THE VILLAGE!

MOTHER!!!

I'M COMING MO...

THER...


EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY NOW, MAMA. I'M HERE.
MY BEAUTIFUL ROSE...
SHHHH! DON'T TRY TO TALK. I NEED TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE!
ROSE, PLEASE...I... I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME...
DON'T SAY THAT! YOU'RE GOING TO BE FINE...
YOU HAVE TO RUN! GET AS FAR AWAY FROM HERE AS YOU CAN!


THEY'RE COMING...!
I'M NOT LEAVING WITHOUT YOU! MOTHER?!
MOTHER...?!
NOOOO!
I...I LOVE YOU MAMA...

THE CITY OF VENTA BELGARUM
"...SOMETHING MUST BE DONE, YOUR MAJESTY..."
...SICKNESS IS SPREADING THROUGH THE CITY...
...OUR STORES HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED AND CHILDREN ARE DYING IN THE STREETS. MY COLLEAGUES AND I WORRY A PLAGUE...
BOOM!
YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD CRAWL UNDER THEIR DESKS AND SHIT THEMSELVES IF THEY WERE FORCED TO DEAL WITH THE REALITIES THIS KINGDOM FACES.

WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO IGNORE THE SUFFERING...
SUFFERING? SUFFERING BUILDS CHARACTER...
STRENGTH? LET THE WEAK PERISH, THE STRONG WILL SURVIVE...
...THEY ALWAYS DO.
THE LAST THING WE NEED IS A PLAGUE, MADAME GREY. I WILL CONSIDER YOUR REQUEST.
I ASK NOTHING MORE, YOUR MAJESTY.
MADAME GREY'S COMPLAINTS, ONCE AMUSING, HAVE BEGUN TO BORE ME. KILL HER.

AND YOU, SIR DANTE. WHAT NEWS HAVE YOU?
MY QUEEN. THE VILLAGE WAS CLEANSED, BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE REBELS.

SO YOU LET THEM ESCAPE AND THEN RETURNED TO SEE IF I WAS WEAK ENOUGH TO ACCEPT YOUR EXCUSES.

HAVE YOU NOT LEARNED YET, THAT I DON'T TOLERATE FOOLS OR FAILURE, DANTE?

PLEASE... YOUR MAJESTY. I RETURNED ONLY...

PERHAPS YOU NEED TO BE REMINDED...TO SUFFER. DIDN'T YOU SAY IT BUILDS STRENGTH...?
YOUR ARROGANCE MAKES YOU WEAK..
...BUT I HAVE LEARNED TO EXPECT SUCH BEHAVIOUR FROM MEN.
YOU ARE FORTUNATE THAT I HAVE ANOTHER TASK FOR YOU.
MAGIC IS BEING USED AGAIN IN THE KINGDOM. FIND THE SOURCE AND BRING IT TO ME.
YOUR HIGHNESS.
AND DO NOT FAIL ME AGAIN, DANTE.

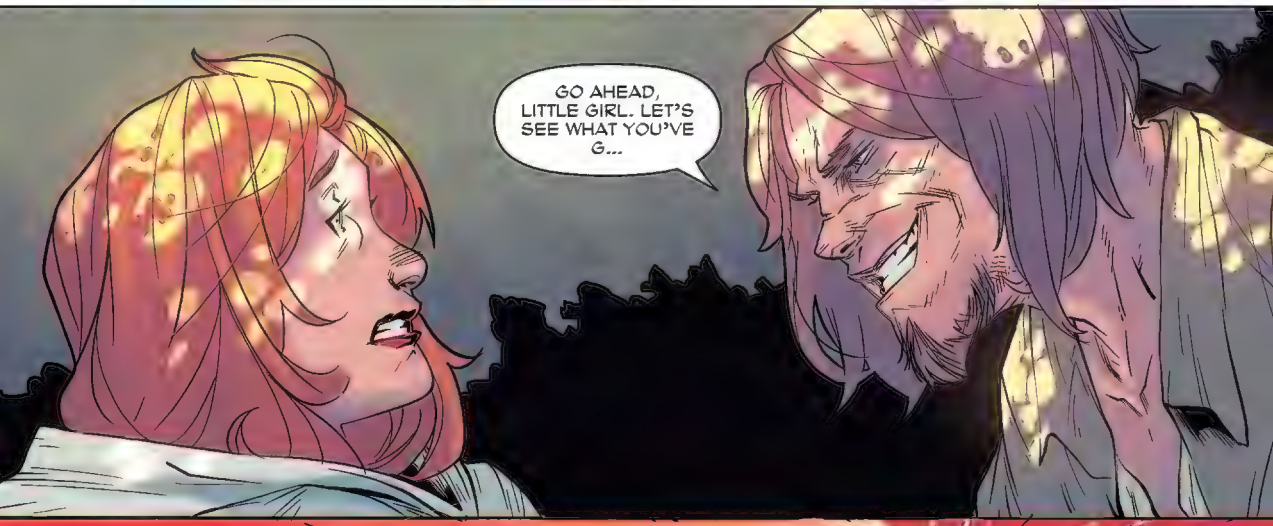
DID YOU SEE, FATHER?! DID YOU SEE HOW I CONTROLLED HIM?
HOW I TAUGHT HIM TO GROVEL AT MY FEET?
YOU TOLD ME I WAS WEAK. THAT I WOULD NEVER BE GOOD ENOUGH.
BUT WHERE ARE MY BROTHERS NOW, FATHER?
IT IS I, DRUCILLA, FIRSTBORN, WHO RULES THIS KINGDOM YOU LOVED SO MUCH MORE THAN ANY OF US.
YOU SOLD ME, YOUR FLESH AND BLOOD, LIKE I WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A POSSESSION TO BE DISPOSED OF. BUT I WILL SHOW YOU THAT I HAVE THE STRENGTH TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE!
I WILL NOT STOP UNTIL ALL MAGIC HAS BEEN DESTROYED AND I HAVE BROUGHT THIS ENTIRE KINGDOM TO ITS KNEES. THEN WE WILL SEE WHO IS WEAK.

MOTHER SAID THE QUEEN'S MEN WERE AROUND HERE, BUT THEY CAN'T HAVE GOTTEN FAR.
AND WHEN I FIND THEM... *SNIFF* THEY'RE GOING TO PAY FOR WHAT THEY'VE...
...OOMMFF.
WHA...?!

GOOD JOB, BJARKE.
WELL, WELL, WELL. WHAT HAVE WE HERE? A LITTLE GIRL LOST IN THE BIG BAD WOODS, OR SOMETHING ELSE?
W–WHO ARE YOU?
I DON'T KNOW...SHE DON'T LOOK LIKE MUCH OF A SPY, WILL.
WHY ELSE WOULD SHE BE ROAMING AROUND WAY OUT HERE?
BUT I KNOW HOW TO MAKE SPIES TALK.

TOUCH ME AND *DIE!*

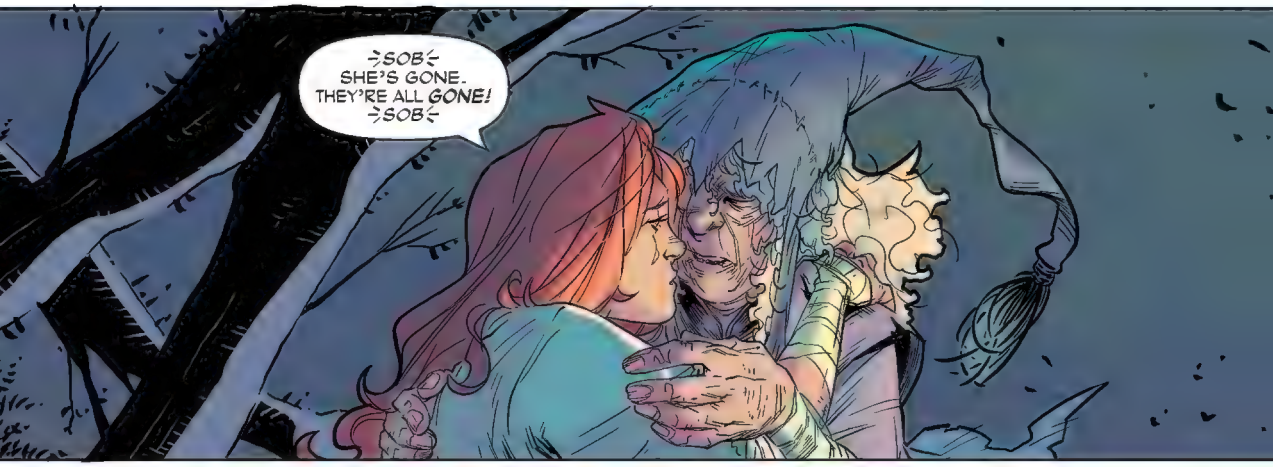
OH, SHE'S A FEISTY ONE, BOYS.

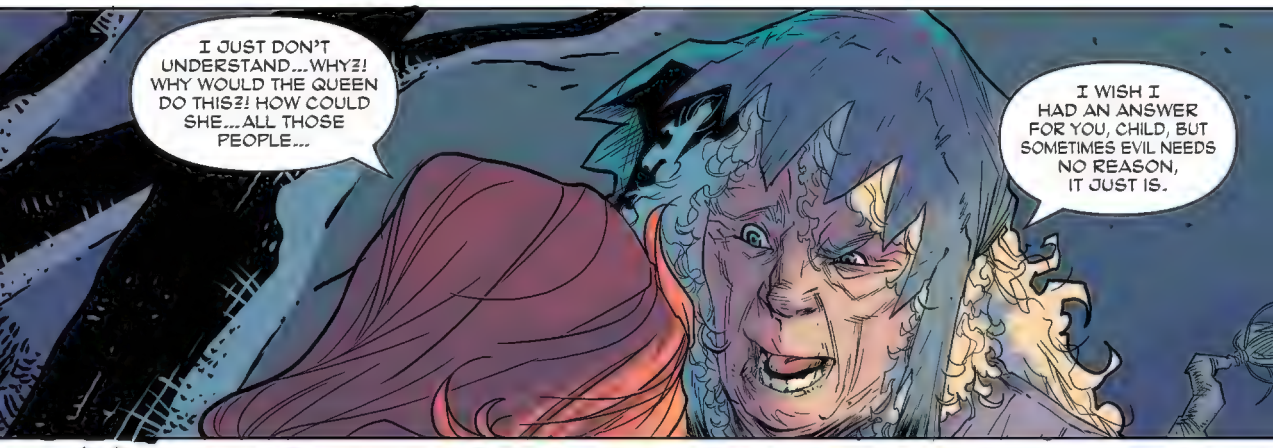

GO AHEAD, LITTLE GIRL. LET'S SEE WHAT YOU'VE G...

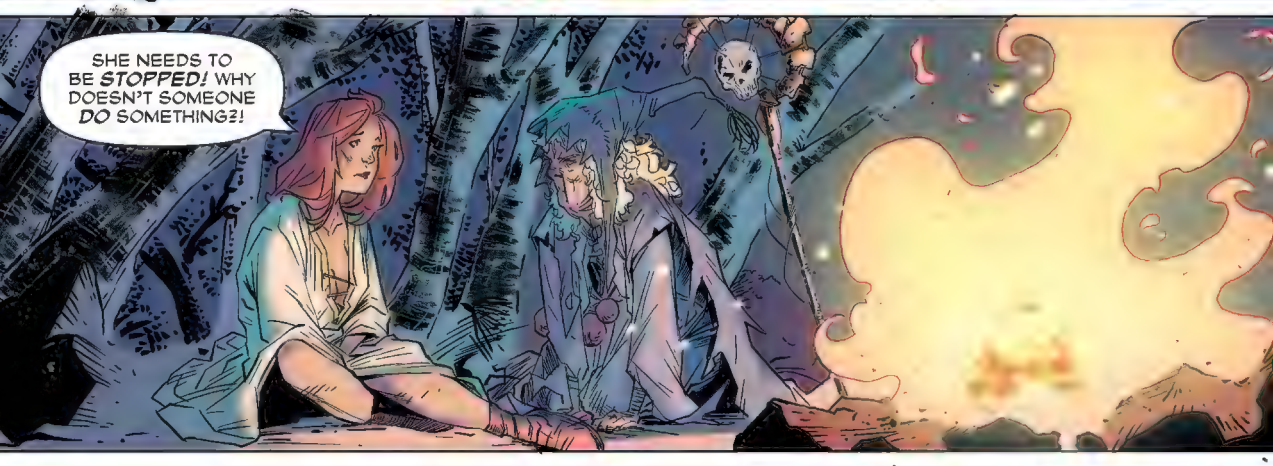
THWACK
...AGGGHHH!
QUIT TEASING THE POOR GIRL, WILLIAM. TO LOOK AT YOU IS TERRIFYING ENOUGH.

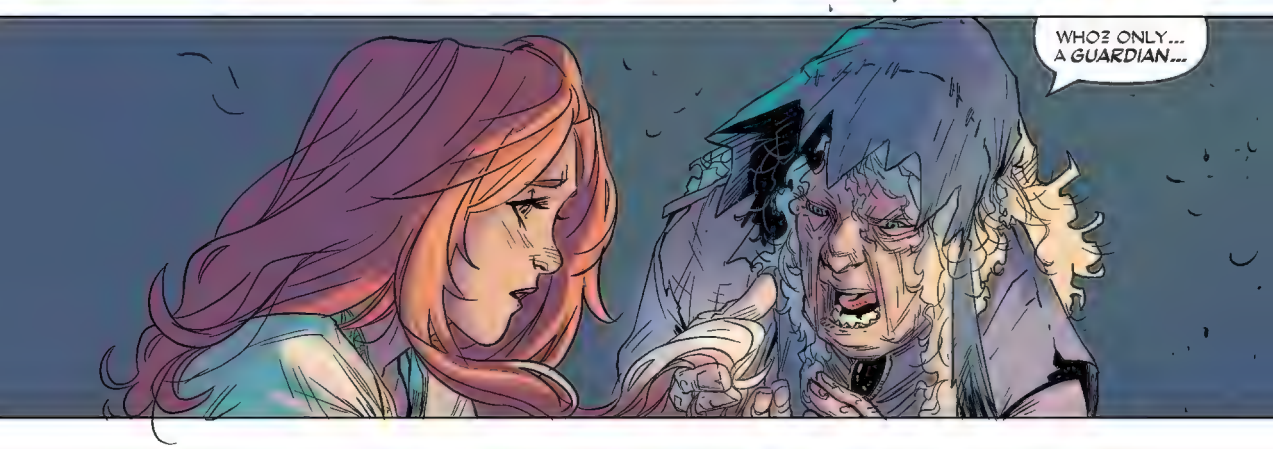
GET UP, CHILD. NO ONE HERE WILL HURT YOU.

THE BOYS HAVE GONE BACK TO SEE IF THERE ARE ANY OTHER SURVIVORS IN YOUR VILLAGE, BUT I WOULD NOT GET MY HOPES UP. THE QUEEN'S MEN ARE NOTHING IF NOT THOROUGH.
NOW, LET ME TAKE A LOOK AT THIS HAND.
THAT IS A BAD BURN YOU HAVE THERE, AND IT IS BEST TO TEND WOUNDS WHEN THEY ARE NEW AND OPEN SO THEY CAN HEAL PROPERLY.
LETTING THEM FESTER ONLY MAKES US SICKER, AND IF LEFT LONG ENOUGH...
...THEY CAN KILL.
I AM ILA.


~SOB~ SHE'S GONE. THEY'RE ALL GONE! ~SOB~


I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND...WHY?! WHY WOULD THE QUEEN DO THIS?! HOW COULD SHE...ALL THOSE PEOPLE...
I WISH I HAD AN ANSWER FOR YOU, CHILD, BUT SOMETIMES EVIL NEEDS NO REASON, IT JUST IS.


SHE NEEDS TO BE STOPPED! WHY DOESN'T SOMEONE DO SOMETHING?!


WHO? ONLY... A GUARDIAN...

IF YOU TWO ARE FINISHED, WE NEED TO MOVE. THE QUEEN'S MEN ARE HEADED THIS WAY.
WAIT! IT WAS *YOU!* YOU'RE THE REBELS! YOU BROUGHT THE QUEEN'S GUARD HERE!
WE ARE SURVIVORS, LIKE YOU, ROSE. *WE* DID NOT BURN YOUR VILLAGE. *WE* DID NOT KILL YOUR MOTHER. BUT WE CAN HELP YOU FIND THOSE WHO DID.

FOR YEARS I HAVE SEARCHED THROUGH DUSTY TOMES, SCOURED THE MINDS OF COUNTLESS PUNY WIZARDS, ALL TO FIND THE KEY TO MY REVENGE.
AND FINALLY, I HAVE SUCCEEDED.
I WILL NOT ALLOW ANYTHING TO THREATEN THAT. NOT WHEN I AM THIS CLOSE TO VICTORY.
MY WRAITHS ARE THE PERFECT TOOL, DRAWN TO A MAGIC THAT IS NO LONGER THEIR OWN.
GO, MY CHILDREN. FIND THE SOURCE OF THE MAGIC AND BRING IT TO ME. AND IF YOU SHOULD ENCOUNTER THAT FOOL DANTE IN YOUR SEARCH...YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
NEXT MONTH: A HIDDEN CURSE

ROSE™

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NEXT MONTH

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SNEAK PREVIEW

SARAH VAUGHN JONATHAN LUNA

ETERNAL EMPIRE

image

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141 years later. Essla.

Nnnnn--

--nng!

SHF

Get back to work.
KLMP

My hands... they're *frozen!*
Not my problem. The Empress' army needs to be fed.

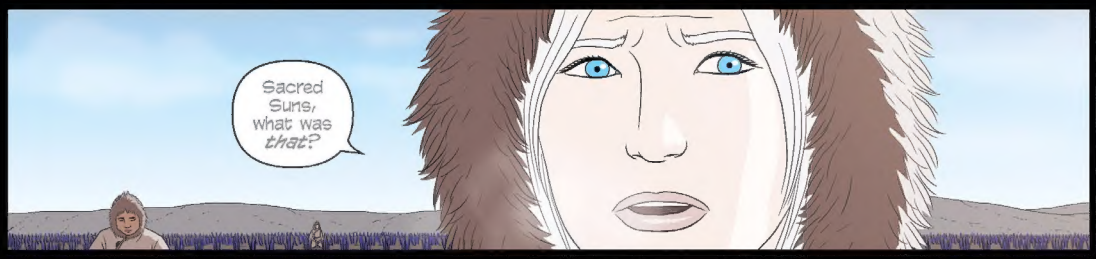
Get back to work!
Argh!

The gynn an is coming tn.s way!

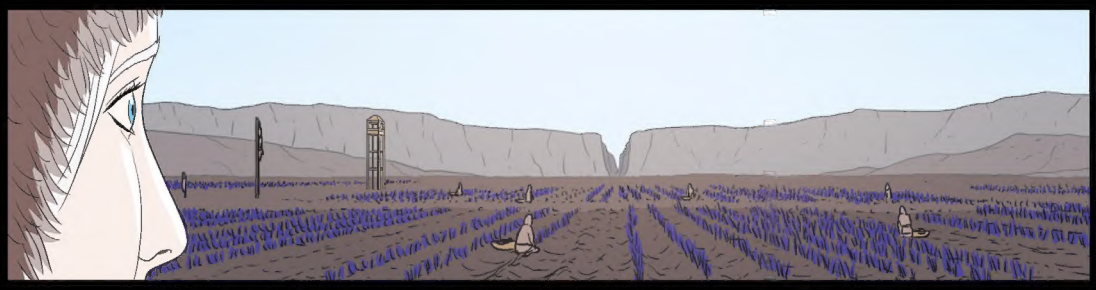
Hnnnn--

--nng!
SHF

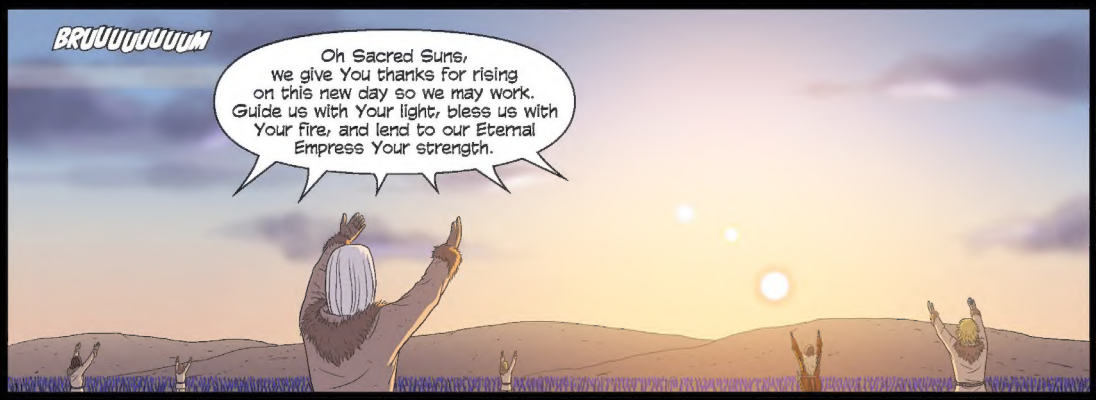
Whoo

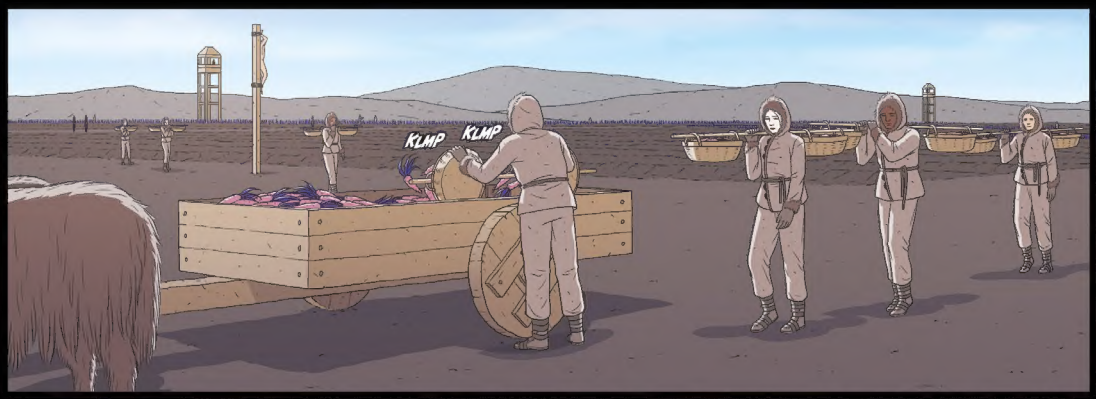

Sacred Suns, what was *that*?

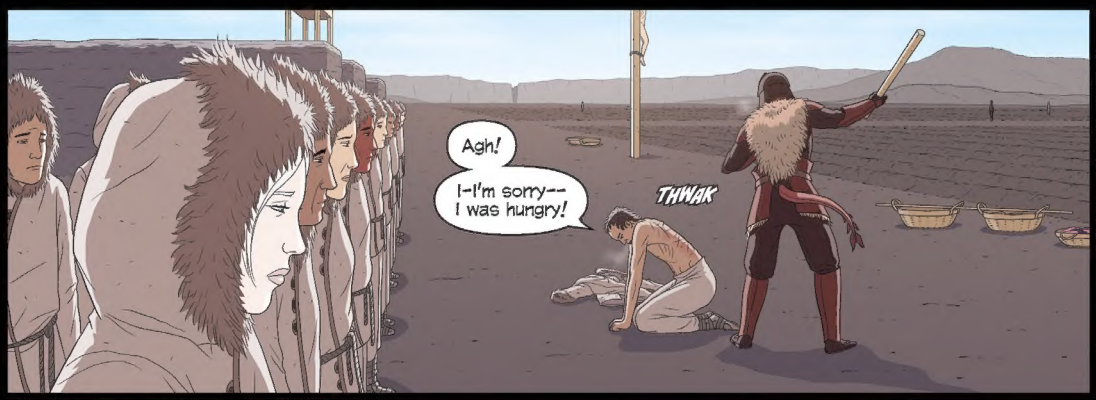
It feels like...
...it came from the north...



So much pain...
...and warmth...
...







CONTINUED IN ***ETERNAL EMPIRE #1,*** ON SALE
MAY 2017

Dangerous deserts, threatening bodyguards, and astral projection to faraway planets...

Boetema's journey is *just* beginning.

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MEPHISTO